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ABSTRACT

A unit is described for teaching audience analysis in a high school expository writing course. The five main sections of the unit are (1) an analysis of audience as part of writing, (2) the writer as a decision maker, (3) testing audience reaction during the composing process, (4) post-communication audience reaction assessment, and (5) experiments and methods of implementation. Included in the fifth section are three experiments for orienting student writers to their audiences and four suggestions for implementing audience analysis. The experiments are augmented with tips for students evaluating the papers of their peers, proofreading pointers (content and form), and a list of questions to ask during self-evaluation of writing. The suggested methods of implementation revolve around the projection of personas in writing, audience identification, audience traits, and the kinds of assumptions that are made based on audience traits. An outline for teaching reader-centered writing and a list of four references that discuss the audience orientations of writers are attached. (RL)

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Audience Analysis Unit for Expository Writing I

Submitted by Kathy Barnoske and Leslie Wilson

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

I. An analysis of audience as part of writing.

II. The writer as a decision maker.

III. Testing audience reaction during the composing process.

IV. Post-communication audience reaction assessment.

V. Experiments and methods of implemention.

I. Most of your writing efforts attempt to communicate. While there may be some forms of highly personal writing, including diaries and notes to yourself which you do not wish others to read or even see, you hope that at least one other person reads the vast majority of what you write. Written communication at its most basic level includes a writer (who) trying to say something (what) to a reader (to whom) with an effect (response). If the setting (when), form (how), and purpose (why) are added to the scenario, the definition of writing as communication becomes complete. Notice that "to whom" is an integral part of the process.

Considering the reader while writing may be a new concept for you. However, you have probably done so in the past without being conscious of the adjustments you were making. When filling out a job application, you probably tried to include the items a potential employer would want to see. Your personal notes and letters to friends state your feelings and describe your actions with different words than you would use if you were writing to one of your grandparents. In your classes you try to write in a manner which pleases your teacher. In a very real way, you write for an audience already.

II. The writer should try to control the reader's response by making intelligent reader-centered choices among the writer's options throughout the composing process. Lest you think the preceding sentence too complicated, consider the parts of the composing process and the writer's options for a moment. The composing process might be divided into the following steps:

A. Pre-writing
B. Writing a rough draft
C. Revising a rough draft
D. Writing a final draft

The writer makes a series of decisions, some of which are: the ideas to be included, the organizational pattern to be followed, the supporting devices most appropriate, the kind of language to be used, how much detail to include, how to vary sentence structure, and even whether to type or write the message. The writer anticipates the effects his message will have on readers with each decision he makes. You see the writer's goal is to match his desired effects with the real dominant effects on readers.

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III. How can a writer anticipate a reader's response? you might ask. First, the writer needs to assess his audience. The following list provides a partial itemization of the demographic factors of audience analysis:

A. Personality traits
   1. Conformity
   2. Anti-conformity
   3. Independence
   4. Variability
   5. Dogmatics
   6. Self-esteem
B. Sex
C. Age
D. Intelligence
E. Value system
F. Socio-economic status
G. Occupation

Secondly, a writer makes inferences. That means he makes mental judgments about what the demographic factors mean in light of his purpose and content. For example, if the writer realizes that his audience is older, he may infer that the readers will be conservative. If his purpose is persuasive and his content is controversial, he may decide that he needs to choose an inductive pattern of organization and he needs to emphasize logical appeals and supports. This process of inference is a kind of intelligent guesswork. Primarily, based on experience, observation, and knowledge, a writer makes assumptions. Research findings have confirmed some "guesses" you might have made:1)older people are more susceptible to persuasion than younger people ("you can't teach an old dog new tricks"), 2) females are more persuasible than males, and 3) intelligence as measured by the number of degrees a person has does not have any significant effect on persuasibility. Obviously, the extent of an audience's knowledge of a given subject affects the degree of specificity necessary and the appropriateness of a particular vocabulary.

The professional writer can use market clues to help in inference making: A given magazine or journal has a limited circulation. The writer attempts to write toward the middle of the subscribers. He hopes to sell his manuscript. Unless he adjusts to his audience, his article will have limited marketability. Thus, the professional writer frequently "tests the waters" before submitting a final draft for publication consideration. He actively solicits input from his colleagues and friends before writing a final copy.

IV. Once a final copy has been written, how does a writer know if he has been successful in reaching his readers? The professional writer knows initially when he sells a manuscript. Later, he can gauge effectiveness by the number of copies sold, the reviews, and by reader correspondence. Several avenues of obtaining feedback face the student writer. The most obvious is, of course, the grade a student receives on his paper. If the student wishes to test audience response beyond the classroom teacher's reaction, he can try to get the article, story, or poem published in an appropriate magazine or newspaper. He can also try showing his manuscript to people in his hypothetical audience and solicit feedback. For example, if a student were writing a composition of advice to a freshman, he could have several freshmen read the paper and ask them what they thought about it or observe their subsequent behavior to determine his effectiveness.

As you have probably already noticed, the feedback in writing is much less immediate and less obvious than the feedback a public speaker receives. Therefore, it behooves the writer to actively seek out feedback. Through an analysis of reader responses a writer improves effectiveness.

V. A. Experiments

1. Watch another student read something you have written. Strange as this experiment may seem, you will learn a great deal by observing someone else read your paper.

   a. Does the reader's rate of reading vary?
   b. Does the reader look puzzled?
   c. Does the reader reread sections?
   d. Does the reader ask questions? giggle? smile? squirm?

2. Act as a peer evaluator for one of your classmates. You might use the following tips and guidelines developed by Ulle E. Lewis of Ohio Wesleyan and Mrs. Barnoske.

TIPS FOR STUDENTS EVALUATING THE PAPERS OF THEIR PEERS

When you first receive a paper, resist the urge to begin reading it straight through word by word, correcting every little error you see. Scan it first for major problems.

1. Read the first and last paragraphs of the paper to determine whether they have a common thesis and focus. If they have little in common, you may have on your hands a paper which has switched topics somewhere in the middle. You can often find the place where the paper shifts topics simply by reading the first sentence of each paragraph.

2. Skim the paper to check whether the thesis has been developed and "proved." In addition, watch for many short paragraphs with very general topic sentences: such paragraphs may represent nothing more than a collection of possible introductions to various aspects of the topic, rather than a sequential line of reasoning to "prove" one thesis.

IF THE PAPER CONTAINS ERRORS 1. OR 2., RETURN IT TO THE STUDENT IMMEDIATELY FOR RE-WRITING. URGE THE WRITER TO CONSULT OUR HANDOUTS ON ESSAY ORGANIZATION AND OUTLINING FOR HELP IN RE-STRUCTURING AND DEVELOPING THE ESSAY.

3. Examine the introductory paragraph. Does it have a thesis sentence that accurately announces the main thrust of the paper? Do the subsequent sentences give a preview of the progression of ideas to be developed in proving the thesis statement?

4. Check the organizational structure of the paper. Is the outline of the paper discernible? Can the reader skimming the paper reproduce the plan which the writer followed? (When reading long papers, I find it useful to actually jot down the sequence of ideas being presented.)

5. Do the sub-points develop the topic with sufficient completeness? Obviously it is easier to detect faults in what is included, and harder to detach oneself to consider omissions. Nonetheless, once you have determined that the paper does have a clear plan, it is worthwhile to ask whether it includes everything that it ought.

6. Is the development free from repetition and irrelevance? Has the student treated the same point in two different places? Are there sentences or entire paragraphs that drift away from the thesis of the paper? (A related problem is proportion: has the student given a minor point more space or emphasis than its relative importance justifies?)

7. Are the ideas arranged in a logical or appropriate sequence? Like completeness, this area is easy to overlook, but it is worth taking a minute to ask, "Is this the most effective organizational plan the student could have chosen?"

8. Check for proper integration of source material and quotations. A student's research paper sometimes is too dependent upon quoted material, or fails to integrate quoted material smoothly with the student's own points, or paraphrases large sections from a few sources. The student may have to re-write the entire paper if he/she has allowed the sources to dominate the paper.

Only after checking for the eight problems noted above should you focus on grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling. Unless the mechanical errors are overwhelming in number, they will not interfere with readability nearly as much as these larger problems do.

9. Identify the best section of the composition and describe what makes it effective.

10. Identify a sentence, a group of sentences, or a paragraph that needs revision, and revise it.

11. Identify one or two things the writer can do to improve his/her next piece of writing.

12. What were the goals the writer was working on? Were they reached? If not, identify those passages that need improvement and revise those sections. If revisions are necessary, set up the same goals for the next paper and delete question 11.

3. Act as your own audience. Let your paper set a day or two (if you can) and then return to your composition and reread it. The first of the following guides was developed at the Delaware Technical and Community College, and the second was developed by Mrs. Barnoske.

a. PROOFREADING POINTERS

So you think you made it! You finished your paper with five minutes to spare. Hurrying to class, you glibly place it on your instructor's desk and rejoice that you've completed one more assignment on time. Unfortunately, when papers are completed in this frenzied manner, they do not usually pass because of proofreading errors left undetected. All of your efforts will have gone to waste.

Why waste all of this energy for nothing when with a little more time and a little know-how, you can proofread your work and be assured that your writing is effective and correct.

The purpose of this handout is to supply you with some hints that are known to be helpful when proofreading papers. In addition, it will show you a plan of attack for learning how to spot troublesome areas in your writing as well as methods for recording any mistakes.

When you proofread anything, you should be concerned with two main ideas -- CONTENT and FORM. Check the content of your paper to see if you achieved your purpose for writing the paper. Do you say what you planned to say? Does every sentence in your paper develop or explain your main idea? Does your conclusion summarize your introductory statement?

CONTENT

Try this easy method for proofreading content. It works equally well for individual paragraphs or longer papers:

1. Locate the topic sentence or introductory paragraph, noting particularly the controlling idea. Does it draw the reader's interest?
2. Check to see if the concluding sentence or concluding paragraph restates the idea using different words. Does it summarize the main point or points?
3. Make sure that each supporting sentence or supporting paragraph relates to the introductory idea.
4. Delete any irrelevant statements from the content.
5. Have you included enough supportive information to develop your introductory idea adequately?
6. Does your paper contain appropriate transitions where they will be helpful?
7. Does your paper maintain the same tense throughout?
8. Does your paper maintain the same point of view (person) throughout?
9. Do all pronouns agree in number with their antecedents?
10. Do you have a reason for each punctuation mark?
11. Do all subjects agree in number with their verbs?
12. Is there any awkward wording in your paper?
13. Have you misspelled any word?
14. Are the language and tone appropriate?
15. Are there any clichés or slang in your report?

A List of Do Not's

1. Do not call the reader's attention to the fact that you are writing a report by using such phrases as "In this report I am going to tell you how to ..."
2. Avoid the use of first person (I or we) unless it is absolutely essential to what you are writing about. Also, avoid the use of second person (you). Generally, it is preferable to stick to the third person (he, she, it, one, they).
3. Do not use contractions (aren't, they're, etc.)
4. Do not use abbreviations (no., U.S., etc.)
5. Do not hand in more than one paper at a time. You must have the benefit of the instructor's comments on one before you write the next one.

If, at this point, you find some trouble spots in your content, make whatever revisions that are necessary before you even consider checking the other area of proofreading - the FORM.

FORM

In proofreading, the other area to examine closely is form. Form includes such mechanical considerations as grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling. No matter how excellent your paper is in content, faulty mechanics can and will detract from it. Because there are so many problem areas in the broad category of form, you should approach proofreading for mechanics by systematically using the following checklist:

1. Make sure each sentence is complete. Revise any fragment or run-on.

NOTE: There are two easy ways to check sentence structure?
   a. Read each sentence by itself (out of the context of the paper).
   b. Read each sentence in reverse order (start with the last sentence first).

ALWAYS READ SENTENCES OUT LOUD.

2. Underline all words that you need to check for spelling.

NOTE: Keep a list of words you look up for future reference.

3. Be able to justify (with a rule) the use of any comma or semi-colon.

4. While reading sentences aloud, check for missing words or word endings, especially -ed and -ing.

These four items usually cause the most trouble in papers, but, of course, there may be other individual problems. The best method for dealing with individual proofreading problems is to record them and to check for these errors in future papers.

Remember these additional hints when proofreading:

1. Always read your material out loud. Be sure to read only what you wrote, not what you think you wrote.
2. Don't proofread your papers as soon as you finish writing them. Let them "get cold" for at least an hour. Then proofread.

3. Keep an up-to-date record of the kinds of errors you tend to make in your writing and work on eliminating them in successive papers.

4. Have someone else read your papers for content and form before you submit them.

Proofreading is a very important step in the writing process because a well-written paper is a pleasure to read. Furthermore, the content of the paper can be best conveyed when there is no interference caused by grammar and spelling errors. Since the process of proofreading consists of only a few steps, each time you complete them you will find proofreading easier to do, and your papers will definitely improve because of your efforts.

b. SELF-EVALUATION OF WRITING

1. How much time did you spend on this paper?

2. What did you try to improve, or experiment with, on this paper?

   How successful were you?

   If you have any questions about what you were trying to do, what are they?

3. What are the strengths of your paper?

   Place a squiggly line beside those passages you feel are very good.

4. What are the weaknesses, if any, of your paper?

   Place an X beside passages you would like your teacher to correct or revise.

   Place an X over any punctuation, spelling, usage, etc., where you need help or clarification.

5. What one thing will you do to improve your next piece of writing?

   Or, what kind of experimentation in writing would you like to try? List.

   Also, if you would like some information relating to what you would like to try to do, list your questions.

4. Complete a demographic analysis of an audience via a newspaper.

Find a newspaper of a community with which you are unfamiliar. Analyze the paper and then make inferences about the people in the community. If you can, visit the community or write to someone in the community or the Chamber of Commerce of the community and ask for a description of their town.

Here are some questions which can help you.

a. Which articles appear on the front page? What topics are covered in the article? How much space is devoted to each topic? What does the relative amount of space tell you about the values of the community?

b. What views are expressed on the editorial page? Are the topics of local, national or international concern? Would you label the expressed attitudes conservative or liberal? What are the political leanings of the residents?

c. What items appear in the advertisements? How much do they cost? What is the price of housing? What is in the classified ad section?

d. What items are in the want ads? Is there any unemployment? In other words, what is the relative length of the help wanted section and the positions desired section?

e. Next, look at the obituaries. How old are people when they die? What does that tell you about the relative number of senior citizens in the community? Why do they die? What does that tell you about the environment, pace, or traffic safety in the community?

f. Look at the police notes. Why are people arrested? How many are arrested in what period of time? What does that information tell you?

g. Look at the social notes. What do the people do for fun? Play bridge? euchre? golf? bowl? curl? play tennis? visit one another? go to book clubs?

h. Look at the sports section. Do the reported activities reflect high school activities? grade school activities? local bowling leagues? college sports?

i. See how religious issues are treated? Are church or synagogue services published? How many different sects are represented?

j. You will find many more things to assess, but save yourself some time to consider the paper as a whole entity. How many pages are devoted to each of the subcategories and subtopics? How many pictures are included? How much space is advertising versus article space.

Your final step is inference. Given your assessment of the newspaper, what can you say about the whole community?

This experiment can be a great deal of fun. It is also an excellent way to start thinking about what an audience is.

5. Guess another writer's intended readers. When you are reading an article or short story, ask yourself:

   a. Did the author write this for me? If so, what does he do to insure that he will obtain and retain your attention? What do you like about the manuscript? If not, for whom did the author write? How can you tell?

   b. Analyze the tone, vocabulary, values, style and organization of the piece. What is the author like? What judgments did he make about you, the reader? What other choices could he have made?

Remember throughout the experiment that writing is controlled use of language for a given response. We can learn to write better by seeing how others make composing decisions.

B. Methods of Implementation

1. Persona

   a. Various roles and honesty
   b. Deciding on image

Persona is the image that you, as the writer, are going to project for your audience.

How can I project various images and still be honest?

Psychologists have indicated that the normal person plays many roles. People find themselves in a variety of situations during the course of a day, and they adjust their behavior accordingly. This behavior is sincere and people are themselves, but in a flexible way that allows them to choose responses appropriate to their situation and audience. Of course, in writing it is important to be yourself; so be yourself -- don't try to fake a pose that is not really you. Yet, remember that there are many poses which you can assume with no dishonesty.

Example: In the classroom, the instructor plays the role of teacher and acts somewhat differently than ten minutes ago when he was with his colleagues. In the classroom he is expected to present a lesson and to answer questions that the students may have.

Exercise: Identify the sincere roles and explain the expected accompanying behavior that a teenager plays when he is in the following situations:

1. in the classroom
2. at the dinner table with parents
3. at McDonald's with friends

C. Deciding on a persona for writing

Especially when you are not personally familiar with your audience, you need to think about your purpose, the make-up of your audience, and the image of yourself that you want to project. Thinking about the image before you begin to write helps to frame an appeal by choosing appropriate language, tone, and sentence structure, as well as appropriate content. Your ability to establish a credible persona worthy of the respect and attention of the audience is the crux of the ethical appeal, which is an appeal that convinces because of the speaker's integrity. Remember that carelessness can greatly damage your image!

Example: Your purpose is to protect H-F's plans to remodel teacher office areas when you are still being required to purchase some paper back books in English classes.

You could take on the role of an angry young person who is concerned about the quality of education and the right to a free education, as well as one who is distressed about misplaced priorities in spending.

Exercise: Describe very briefly the persona you would want to adopt in the following situations:

a. You are trying to convince the Director of English at H-F that you deserve a grade higher than what you received in one of your English elective courses.

b. You are editor of a student newspaper, replying to a letter from an outraged parent that begins with this paragraph:

> "The entire high school swarms with burnout types. Skummy, red-eyed, spaced-out individuals shuffle to their classes, where they sit staring blankly. One pathetic creature in E-Building bumped into a couple lockers, hung onto them, and then walked into the wrong classroom. The lethargic characters barely look as though they belong to the human race."

2. Audience Identification

When the audience is not easily identified through the purpose or assignment, you must decide upon an appropriate audience, according to the following criteria:

a. Who is in power to make the change I am requesting?
b. Who would be most interested in my topic?
c. If you think your audience could be absolutely anyone, you can narrow your audience by writing for the other students in the class. Even though the writer uses the above criteria to decide upon a rhetorical audience to reach through his writing, he, of course, must keep in mind that the teacher will ultimately be grading the assignment and must, therefore, meet that teacher's expectations.

Example: The passing periods at H-F should be lengthened to twelve minutes. The audience is the administration and the board of education because they have the power to change the passing period time.

Exercise: Identify the audience for the following opinions:

a. Expository Writing II at H-F should be required for all juniors and seniors.
b. The curfew for young teenagers in Homewood should be 12:00 p.m. on week nights.
c. The restriction on male visiting hours in female dormitories at this university should be removed.

3. Audience Traits

Audience traits are characteristics that the majority in the audience have in common. The writer bases his rhetoric upon these things that he knows about the audience. Audience traits include such characteristics as:

a. age
b. sex
c. educational and social backgrounds
d. kind of work or profession
e. concerns and values
f. attitudes about religion, sex, and politics

Example: The members of the board at your college to whom your proposal is addressed are: a) middle age, from thirty-five to fifty-five, b) they are well educated, c) they are concerned about the morale of the students, but they are also concerned about their study habits, d) the board members are sensitive to the opinions of the students, parents, alumni, and trustees.

Why is knowing these traits important?

Knowing the audience traits enables the writer to decide on the following:

a. What to include in your argument or discussion and what to leave out.
b. The kind of vocabulary and tone to use.
c. The shared experiences the writer and his audience may have that the writer may draw upon.

Exercise: List the following audiences:

a. Your parents
b. The Ministerial Association in Homewood or Flossmoor
c. The superintendent of H-F

Activity: Examine copies of the following magazines and imagine that you have been asked to write articles for any three of these publications. Then specify a) who your audience would be in each case,and b) what important characteristics the audience would have, and c) what differences and similarities there are in paired magazines:

Seventeen	Ingenue
The New York Times	The Christian Science Monitor
The Reader's Digest	U.S. News and World Report
McCall's or Glamour	New Woman

Playboy	Esquire
Better Homes & Gardens	Family Circle
Ebony	Chicago Tribune Magazine, New York Times, or Parade
Psychology Today	A professional journal in psychology such as Journal of Psychology
Time	Newsweek

Compare and contrast the audience of readers in the paired publications above.

4. Kinds of assumptions based upon audience traits?

You can make certain conclusions about your audience based upon their traits. However, these conclusions must be legitimately arrived at.

For example:

Trait	Conclusion
a) High school board members are middle age, between 35-55.	a) When they were in high school, 17 to 37 years ago, high schools were generally smaller and students were given fewer choices.
b) Well educated	b) Probably intelligent and like to think of themselves as open minded and open to reason.
c) High school board members are elected and not paid.	c) Probably very interested in education because they sought the position and material rewards are minimal.

Audience and Composition or Reader Centered Writing

I. The Communication Process: Lasswell (1948)

A. 1. Who
2. Says what
3. To whom
4. With what effect

B. 1. When: Setting
2. How: Form
3. Why: Purpose

II. Audience Assessment

A. Factors for Consideration

1. Demographic

a. Personality Traits

1. Conformity
2. Anti-conformity
3. Independence
4. Variability
5. Dogmatism
6. Self-esteem

b. Sex
c. Age
d. Intelligence
e. Value System
f. Socio-economic status
g. Occupation

2. Purpose-oriented

a. Determines which of the demographic factors are critical
b. Applies at all stages of the composing process

B. Methods of Assessment

1. Questionnaire
2. Attitude Tests
3. Information Tests
4. Physiographs
5. Observation Inventories
6. Content Analysis

a. Newspapers
b. Diaries
c. Letters
d. Speeches

7. Inference from Samples
8. Interviews

III. Adjustments in the Composing Process: Throughout

A. Factors

1. Selection of sources
2. Motivational concepts
3. Demonstrating relationships
4. Organization
5. Timing, pacing
6. Language: word choice and vocabulary
7. Style
8. Physical appearance
9. Clarity
10. Salience
11. Coherence
12. Integration

a. dominant effect
b. idiosyncratic effect
c. anticipated effect
d. surprise effects
e. process effects
f. product effects

B. Difference in Oral/Written Communication

1. Control of audience vs selective exposure
2. Physical appearance of speaker vs physical presentation
3. Ethos of speaker vs ethos of writer
4. Diversity in audience in typical speaking situation vs reading situation
5. Adjustment to feedback of speaker vs writer's anticipated response
6. One shot in speech exposure vs rereading option in written communication

IV. Post-Communication Assessment

A. Process (non observable)

1. Attention
2. Comprehension
3. Evaluation

B. Product

1. Response

a. Pre-testing
b. Short-term
c. Long-term

2. No response is a response

V. Teaching Audience and Composition

A. Real audience in the classroom

1. Self-evaluation
2. Peer evaluation
3. Teacher evaluation

B. Simulated audience beyond the classroom

C. Real audience beyond the classroom

1. Writing exchange
2. Publishing: Professional evaluation
3. Reading as a key to writing

Reflections on Audience You Should Know About if You Don't Already:

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